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ABSTRACT

Effective staff development programs require environments receptive to change; programming that is institutionally integrated and developmental; program execution that is comprehensive, dynamic, cost-effective, and that can be evaluated; and activity that is pragmatic and action-oriented. Present staff development programs must improve delivery systems, funding, focus, and centralization. Grouping staff development practitioners into consortia working cooperatively to improve staff development programming is the best method of combatting existent weaknesses. (RT)

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. . . against the dying of the light.

Staff Development Confronts the 1980's

A Paper Presented at the
National Conference on Community College
Staff and Organizational Development
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Introduction

The decade of the 1970's has less than twenty-seven months remaining. Soon, we will be searching for a phrase to characterize it. The preceeding decade has been described as the era of expansion. Growth was enormous; enrollment came in waves; funds seemed unlimited. By the close of the 1960's, these trends had reversed and most two-year college practitioners were seeking solutions to a myriad of new problems. One approach, comprehensive staff development, emerged as a strategy capable of engaging the most pressing problems. As the 1970's draw to a close, it is necessary to examine what staff development has become and to suggest direction for its continued evolution.

The purpose of this presentation is to assess the current status of staff development and to determine a focus compatible with the onset of the 1980's. As Frost indicates in "Riders"[1]

> There is our wildest mount - a headless horse.
> But though it runs unbridled off its course,
> And all our blandishments would seem defied,
> We have ideas yet that we haven't tried.

Staff Development - The Contemporary Scene

From the millions of words written about staff development in the past seven years, a design for action has emerged.[2] The process may be examined under four broad characteristics.

The first characteristic may be designated "climate." Staff development programs require environments that are receptive to change. Not all personnel will or need to participate; but, unless

there is a recognition that change is essential to a dynamic environment, no development activity will prosper for long. Further, staff development must be related, directly, to the perceived needs of the participants. Any attempt by one segment of the college to dictate what should occur or for an external agent to prescribe ready-made panaceas will result in subtle resistance and eventual failure. As much attention must be given to the "climate" for staff development as is given to any development activity.

The second characteristic has been described as "program configuration."[3] Staff development programing must be integrative and developmental. The process must be part of on-going institutional practice. Activities that occur during interruptions of college routine which are not consciously woven into the fabric of institutional routine will remain unrealized potential. Also, programing will be successful to the extent that it draws on resources found within the college and focuses on the problems existing there. External resources and outside specialists increase the potential for lack of acceptance. Creative use of what already exists in engaging emergent problems is an effective strategy.

Four elements capsulize the execution of staff development programing. Comprehensiveness; all members of the college community must be eligible to participate and the widest possible range of activities must be included. Exclusion fosters divisiveness which leads to failure. Evaluation; each activity must have a procedure for assessing its impact. Any attempt to mask evaluation of personnel as staff development will result in cynicism and rejection. Dynamism; the activities must develop an impetus and direction or

risk stagnation and stereotyping. Finally, cost effectiveness; the amount of money available is less significant than how that which is available is used. A process for prioritizing activity is critical to the allocation of scarce resources. Further, it is important that regular operating funds be included so that the program will not gain the image of external federal, state, or private largesse. Staff development programs, activities, and products will vary based on the needs and idiosyncrasies of the institution; attention to comprehensiveness, evaluation, dynamism, and cost effectiveness are the commonalities needed for success.

The final characteristic of staff development activity is its pragmatic, action orientation. The process became popular because it presented a methodology for continuing dynamism in a time of retrenchment. During the past seven years, the focus of staff development has changed as new facets of the problem emerge. Any attempt to allow staff development to become passive or reactive will guarantee its imminent demise. Given the need for constant modification, what lies ahead for staff development; what new directions are indicated?

Staff Development: Needs Assessment

In the past several years, attempts have been made to assess the future of Staff Development.[4] From these efforts emerges a series of challenges which must be met. Four general ones appear constant when the current state of staff development activity is examined. They are: delivery system, funding, focus, and centralization.

Staff development has relied on such customary delivery systems as workshops, seminars, conferences, travel, and continuing education to achieve its objectives. Educators are becoming jaded with such traditional activity. Given the sophistication of our diagnostic and technical capability, are there not more efficient ways? Could we not include more people, more effectively than we are now doing? Research into a variety of designs and strategies appears critical.

Staff development emerged at a time when the cornucopia for funding education was running dry. Financial support for programing has been unstable at best. No specific federal entitlement exists; state operating budgets have yet to recognize the importance and permanence of the process. Efforts must be undertaken to increase efficiency in the use of what funding exists and to seek out new, continuing sources of revenue.

Numerous definitions exist for the concept of staff development. All of them scrupulously avoid dealing with the appropriate focus for activity. The two-year college has been characterized as the people's college, a catalyst for community development. Should, then, the community have a say in the nature and direction of staff development? Should, in fact, the community be the source for the college's development activity to insure congruence between community and catalyst? If the two-year college is to remain a viable force in the 1980's, intelligent answers to the foregoing questions are critical. A social institution is only as functional as its contribution to the dynamics of its host environment.

Symbolic, perhaps, of the temper of the 1970's is the disjointed condition of staff development programing. Duplication of effort is rampant; mistakes reoccur constantly. The difficulty is attributable to the diffuse nature of the process. No national data base regarding staff development has been catalogued. More importantly, no central clearing house for information regarding successful strategies, activities, or products exists. Several efforts to form such a network have begun; none has yet proven successful. If staff development is to remain a viable component of the two-year college's preparation for the 1980's, a central resource center is essential.

Unless staff development is able to meet the challenges enumerated above, it may well go the way of various educational fads of recent memory. There appears to be a strategy emerging, however, which could combat the weaknesses currently plaguing staff development.

Staff Development Consortia - A Strategy for the 1980's

In the past year, several groups of staff development practitioners have gathered together in consortium to work cooperatively to improve staff development programing. The concept seems to have emerged spontaneously in such diverse areas as Western Maryland, Florida, New Jersey, and North Carolina.[5] The logic is constant; synergic interaction is a strategy ably suited to meeting the challenges inherent in diffuse, individualized programing. It would appear germane to assess how the consortium concept would combat existent weakness.

Several institutions working together have the potential to provide a variety of experiences beyond the traditional delivery systems. Multiple environments, alone, work against simplistic activity and limited perspectives. Further, several functioning solutions to the same problem encourage expanded perceptions regarding approaches and solutions. Interaction, then, makes it difficult for personnel to become either jaded or tradition-bound.

Funding is, perhaps, the problem which can be met most effectively through consortium activity. Individual financing can be pooled to expand its impact. Development activities or products can be disseminated among consortium members thereby "expanding" the effect of the funds. Further, several institutions working together should be more impactful as they engage federal and state sources of revenue. Funding may well be increased if consortium activity results in better needs analysis and planning being more forcefully presented.

Focus is a natural issue to be examined in the consortium content. In the case of the Western Maryland College Consortium,[6] the colleges have coalesced around a natural geographic region. Statewide activity can lead to regional specialization, effective prioritization, and more efficient interaction with bureaucratic structures. More importantly, the expanded personnel and resource base of the consortium should be more productive in assessing and working with client needs. If clients receive better service, they are more supportive of and responsive to the institution. Such synergy is the goal of the two-year college.

The centralization issue is least effectively addressed by the consortium. The formation of consortia will contribute to the reduction of diffusion, but it will not create a central source of data or model programing. Perhaps, the existence of several large consortia will create a sufficient groundswell to encourage one of the national bureaucracies to act with dispatch. Such an occurrance is devoutly to be wished.

Conclusion

Clearly, the consortium concept is not a panacea for all the challenges facing the two-year college as it prepares for the 1980's. Rather, it is an emergent strategy which appears aptly designed to engage existing challenges. Further, the consortium model would assist the two-year college in remaining a dynamic force for social change at a time when American society sorely needs such forces. Frost, again, underscores the need to cope with change:

> Ah, when to the heart . . .
> Was it ever less than a treason
> To go with the drift of things,
> To yield with a grace to reason,
> And bow and accept the end . . .[7]

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5. The Western Maryland Consortium came into existence with the support of Appalachian Regional Commission funding, The Florida Association is supported by state funding, The New Jersey Consortium on the Community College is supported by a grant from the Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education, U. S. O. E., and the North Carolina State Board for Community Colleges maintains a Staff Development Office.

6. Western Maryland College Consortium. "Staff Development Consortium: Project Package" (Cumberland, Md.: Regional Educational Services Administration, 1976), p. 2.

7. Frost, Robert. "Reluctance" in A Boy's Will (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1915) p. 63.